



# National Fire Plan

2004 Annual Awards

## Excellence in Community Assistance: Natchez Trace Parkway

Every October, the Natchez Trace Parkway participates in Fire Prevention Week by hosting student field trips – in conjunction with the Tupelo Fire Department, Noxubee National Wildlife Refuge, and the Lee County Sheriff's Office. This year, more than 300 third and fourth graders from Pontotoc County schools participated. Students learned about Smokey Bear and how to help prevent unwanted fires; they were also introduced to some of the tools of the trade. Smokey Bear made an appearance, and no one could resist the urge to give him a big hug.

Students were led on a half-mile nature walk where the importance of fire in reducing fuels and perpetuating certain plant species was discussed. For some students, this was the first time they had ever been in a forest.

The fire management program at the Natchez Trace strives to be active in the community by spreading the word about fire and fuels management. The Parkway's fire management program participated in a local "scarecrow trail" hosted by the North Mississippi Horticulture Center Master Gardeners. Businesses and organizations were invited to enter a scarecrow, and the fire management program's scarecrow (appropriately named Hotshot) was a hit. Hotshot wore a sign explaining who he was and where people could get more information about NPS fire management.

The physical characteristics of the Parkway mandate the need for cooperation with the fire service community. The Parkway traverses Mississippi, Alabama, and Tennessee, comprising six districts. It is 444 miles long and averages 825 feet in width. The Parkway contains 45,750 acres in fee-simple title and scenic easements with restrictive covenants on another 5,910 acres. Its boundary is about 1,000 miles long. Much of the land adjacent to the Parkway is rapidly changing from rural agricultural and commercial timber use to urban/suburban use. Urban communities are adjacent to the Parkway and suppression agency capabilities are outpaced by rapid growth in private development and increasing values at risk. Several communities have been identified as of national concern.

Primary suppression providers in these classic wildland/urban interfaces are often the local volunteer fire departments. The Parkway collaborates with 52 rural departments along 444 miles of parkway traversing three states. The Rural Fire Assistance Program provides basic training materials and gear for those departments under the National Fire Plan.

The Natchez Trace Parkway Fire Management Program demonstrates an outstanding contribution and commitment to the goals of the National Fire Plan through collaboration with local agencies, enhancing capabilities of rural departments, and helping the public understand fire and the management challenges it presents.

